



Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks

July 18, 2005

Dear State Park Supporter:

The Parks Division within Fish, Wildlife & Parks is pleased to present you with a Public Review copy of the Draft Marketing Plan for the Parks Division entitled "Connections-A Marketing Plan for Montana State Parks." The 2002 State Park Futures Committee recommended the Division develop a marketing plan as part of its long-term management strategy.

The goal of this plan is to increase the connections between state parks and park users, businesses and communities. Through this plan we hope to increase the utilization of state parks; to increase the top of the mind awareness of all of the attributes of the parks system and the community grants programs operated by the Parks Division; and to add to the economic vitality of communities touched by state parks. Additionally, we hope this plan will guide us in providing better customer service while continuing to protect some of Montana's special places.

Please feel free to send us any comments you may have on the plan -- the direction it sets for State Parks and the Recreation Grants Programs, or how State Parks and the Recreation Grants program can be a better asset to Montanans and our guests.

Comments may be sent to FWP, Parks Division Marketing Plan, P.O. Box 200701, Helena, MT 59620 or by emailing Linda Howard at lhoward@mt.gov by August 19, 2005.

Thank you for taking the time and interest in commenting on how this plan will help shape Montana's future.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Doug", written in a cursive style.

Doug Monger
Administrator
Parks Division

“Connections”

A Marketing Plan for Montana State Parks

Draft Copy for Public Review
Comment to lhoward@mt.gov
by August 19, 2005

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Executive Summary	4
Mission and Vision	4
II. Situational Analysis	6
A. Market Summary	6
1. Market Demographics	6
2. National Travel Trends	8
B. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.....	10
C. Services	12
D. Historical Marketing Efforts	12
III. Marketing Strategy	13
A. Mission	13
B. Target Audiences	13
C. Message and Guiding Principles	14
D. Goals and Objectives.....	15
E. Action Items.....	21
F. Budget	24
IV. Conclusion.....	24

I. Executive Summary

Montana's natural, cultural and recreational heritage is best found in its state parks. Fifty special places have been set aside for the public to enjoy now and forever. The Parks Division also maintains over 300 fishing access sites and administers recreational grants and trails programs, providing hiking trails, groomed snowmobile trails, motorboat use facilities, and other outdoor recreational amenities which further contribute to the quality of life of Montana citizens.

The optional vehicle registration fee instituted in 2004 gives all Montana residents the opportunity to support state parks. In return, the Parks Division has an even greater responsibility to meet the needs of these Montanans and participate as partners in the economic development of local communities. Parks now has the funding sources to enable them to step more fully into the role that was designated for them by the Montana Legislature.

Montana State Parks can do more to:

- Serve visitors and provide good stewardship of resources;
- Better tell the cultural, historical and natural history of the state; and
- Better participate in the economic development of local communities.

With an integrated and well-designed approach, the elements of marketing can create a driving force that attracts new visitors, establishes visitor expectations, manages visitor behavior, and enriches the experience for all guests. It can also allow for tasteful and dynamic partnerships to flourish among those with common visions and well-defined goals.

Mission and Vision

The mission of Montana State Parks is three-fold:

- Conserve a representative diversity of the state's natural, cultural and recreational amenities;
- Provide resource education and interpretation; and
- Help facilitate sustainable economic development through tourism.

Ultimately, the vision is to make Montana's State Parks the primary places where Montanans, and our visitors, of all ages know they can visit to connect to the land and the Montana heritage in a comfortable, welcoming setting.

Documents, including *2020 Vision for Montana State Parks*, the *Montana State Parks Futures II Committee Report* and the Fish, Wildlife & Parks 6-Year Planning Process, have contributed to defining the direction and vision for the state parks programs. Through each of these planning processes emerged five common desirable outcomes which are reflected in this plan.

A parks program where natural, historical/cultural, and recreational resources are enhanced and protected in perpetuity.

A parks program where visitor expectations are met or exceeded due to the quality of the natural and historical/cultural resources, recreational opportunities, facilities, programs and staff.

A parks program which provides outstanding education and interpretation of Montana's natural, historical, cultural, and recreational resources, and the conservation issues which face them.

A parks program which contributes to Montana's growing tourism industry and general economic stability in a manner which is sustainable for the system's key resources.

A recreational grants program that adds to the quality of life of Montana residents by providing funds for outdoor recreational facilities, infrastructure and improvements.

The challenge to be met with this plan is to develop a diverse and creative approach that will move the continually maturing Parks program in a direction that is consistent with the goals established in the *2020 Vision* document, and meets the needs of savvy consumers who want the most value for their money. In the future, site-specific management plans should include marketing strategies consistent with this plan.

II. Situational Analysis

A. Market Summary

1. Market Demographics

Montana residents are by far the larger guest segment in Montana State Parks, as both campers and day users. Visitation statistics show that in 2004, Montanans comprised 73% of park visitors¹.

However, Montana residents also spend \$707 million on out-of-state travel². In part, our challenge is to contribute to the larger tourism industry effort to get Montanans to stay in Montana and explore their state and, more specifically, choose to make State Parks a part of their in-state vacation plans.

The primary emphasis of this plan is to address Montana residents and to positively affect those non-residents who visit our state. Except for our website presence, our publicity efforts and a small amount of out of state promotion through information fulfillment, we will continue to leave the job of attracting out of state visitors to the Montana Promotion Division (Travel Montana).

Parks Visitation Trends

The 2004 Montana state parks visitation report indicates that Montana State Parks served 1.65 million visitors in 2004³, the highest number since 1995. Resident day use fees were eliminated in 2004 which may in part be the reason for increased visitation at state parks located near urban centers.

Day users comprise 86% of the visitors to state parks, with Regions 3, 4 and 5 (Bozeman, Great Falls and Billings) hosting the largest percentage of day use visitors and Regions 7 and 2 (Miles City and Missoula) hosting the largest percentage of overnight visitors.

Residents comprise 85% of the visitors to water-based sites while visitors to cultural and historic sites are split at around 57% residents and 43% non-residents.

Parks with campgrounds vary widely in the number of visitors who use the park for camping versus those who visit only for the day.

¹ 2004 State Parks Visitation Report

² Montana Resident Pleasure Travel survey, travelmontana.mt.state.us/research/ResTrvl.pdf

³ 2004 State Parks Visitation Report

Campground occupancy rates also vary widely. During peak season, some campgrounds, such as Tongue River Reservoir and Flathead Lake sites, are frequently at or near capacity, while others like Lewis and Clark Caverns and Makoshika typically have sites available.

Statewide Trends Affecting Visitation

The population of Montana is increasing, however most of the population expansion is in the west, from Bozeman north through the Flathead Valley. For example, from 1990 to 2000 Flathead County's population grew at 25.8%. This was almost double the U.S. growth rate in the same time frame⁴.

In contrast to western Montana, twenty-two counties in eastern Montana lost population in the last decade while the central portion of the state remained stagnant or experienced growth of 6% or less.

This overall population increase represents people moving to Montana from other states, providing a whole new set of people ready to learn about the Montana heritage.

The changing face of Montana is also impacting the way people use the resources and this poses unique challenges for resource managers. In the western part of the state, with its growing population, there are overuse issues and growing social conflicts among different types of users. Shrinking public recreation access, resulting from real estate development, makes parks and other public land even more desirable by all user groups.

In the eastern third of the state, State Parks and fishing access sites give residents public access to recreational opportunities while providing an economic boost to rural communities.

Resident and Non-Resident Fees

The shift from a resident user pay system for day use to all Montanans having free access to state parks due to the vehicle registration program brought with it a shift in the way resident and non-resident visitors are greeted upon entering parks.

As much as possible, the Parks Division has tried to communicate that residents and non-residents alike pay for the state park system. At this point non-residents have not expressed feelings of

⁴ U.S. Census 2000, www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html

being treated unfairly. Part of this can be attributed to the fact that both residents and non-residents pay the same camping fee. Other state parks systems that have initiated a differential fee system have done so across the board for all fees and problems have developed.

By maintaining equal camping fees for all, and by clearly communicating that all users support the state park system through fees, these problems can be minimized.

2. National Travel Trends

The tourism industry is robust and growing in our state. It is Montana's fastest growing industry, generating \$1.9 billion and hosting 9.8 million nonresidents in 2004⁵.

Unlike previous times, many tourists today prefer hotels, and comfort is the key to the larger market of our nonresident guests. However, the "soft adventure" seeker continues to be significant and important economically. These are visitors who want camping experiences, wildlife viewing, fishing, and other outdoor family fun. They are more focused on the peace and serenity, the beauty and solitude of sleeping in a tent or RV, cooking over an open fire, watching the stars, and telling stories around a campfire under the big sky of Montana.

Soft adventure and trips abroad are two of the biggest trends in travel as the tourism industry continues to rebound from its post-9/11 slump according to the Tourism Industry Association of America (TIA). Montana State Parks are positioned to be leaders in domestic destinations for the 92 million soft adventure travelers who enjoy RV camping, tent camping, hiking, biking, and boating⁶.

In addition, we have seen the advent of the vigorous and dynamic "empty nesters." They are healthy and they have time to spend on their own because their children are grown. They are interested in new adventures and opportunities to relax. They can and do travel in non-traditional vacation times, which makes it very important to include the desires of this group into our Parks system programming and planning. They are important now, and they will continue to be important in the foreseeable future.

Empty nesters have the time and money to travel. They desire comfort and educational opportunities. Some Parks currently fall short of amenities which would attract this market, such as RV

⁵ Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, Visitation and Economics, www.itrr.umt.edu/economicest.htm

⁶ Travel Industry Association, Domestic Travel Market Report, 2003 Edition, www.tia.org/Travel/traveltrends.asp

hook ups, but we have the opportunity to provide value-added activities that would appeal to them and extend our seasons where feasible.

Today's visitors want immersive experiences that allow them to "do it, see it, and ask about it." A recent study by the Travel Industry Association of America reported that about one-fifth of all U.S. travelers had taken an educational travel vacation to "learn or improve a skill, sport or hobby" in the three years prior to the study⁷. There is a great opportunity for State Parks to expand the interpretive programming, special events, trail systems and signs to accommodate these desires.

Festivals and fairs are popular ways for travelers to experience new and interesting cultures. Four in ten (41%) U.S. adult travelers attended a festival and/or fair during a trip in 2002. This translates to an estimated 59.5 million people. The most popular events are heritage, ethnic, or folk festivals (20%). One third of the travelers attended another type of festival or fair, such as a state or county fair or arts and crafts fair⁸. Creating more events at state parks will attract non-resident visitors and give long-time residents a reason to visit their parks again.

The term geotourism is defined as tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of the place being visited - its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents. A study from TIA, and sponsored by National Geographic Traveler, reports there 55 million Americans are now classified as sustainable or "Geotourists," as well as nearly 100 million traveling Americans moving in that direction⁹.

Travelers also desire experiences tailored to their needs for one-stop vacation shopping. Packaging means taking a theme that is motivating to those we cater to in our Parks and using that theme to create a unique experience for our visitor to follow for an interactive, emotional, and enriching adventure. Ideal packages include a theme, driving tour, special events, places to stay, local color, great food, and shopping for items to commemorate the experience. Creating package tours is also an ideal way for Parks staff to connect with local communities.

⁷ Travel Industry Association, Domestic Travel Market Report, 2004 Edition, www.tia.org/Travel/traveltrends.asp

⁸ Travel Industry Association, The Historic/Cultural Traveler, 2003 Edition, www.tia.org/Travel/traveltrends.asp

⁹ Travel Industry Association of America, Geotourists report, 2003, www.tia.org/Travel/traveltrends.asp

Shopping is the most popular trip activity for U.S. adult travelers. 63% of adult travelers included shopping as an activity on a trip¹⁰. Opportunities exist to improve the products we offer visitors to bring home a part of Montana while at the same time promoting State Parks to friends and family.

The attacks on our country on September 11, 2001 led to a rethinking and retrenching of every American, in which the power of family has become more important. In the fast-paced life that most Americans lead, what families crave is more time to spend together. Families are seeking vacation destinations with good value for their money, a variety of things to do, and activities designed and packaged for kids.

When it comes to family travel, children influence more than half of all family travel decisions made by their parents¹¹. Where to eat? Where to stay? Where to go? All these choices depend to some degree on the wants and needs of the children accompanying their parents. That's why it has become increasingly important to develop better experiences for children and produce more communications directed toward them.

A trend called "togetherness" has recently emerged in the tourism industry. Groups composed of multiple families or couples are vacationing collectively because their fast-paced lifestyles don't allow them to connect on a day-to-day basis. This travel segment is looking for reservable group facilities, vacation packages and value-added activities.

These travel trends clearly show that healthy market segments exist to support Montana State Parks. They also indicate those areas of opportunities where Parks could improve services.

B. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) Analysis

To determine issues that affect visitation levels in Parks, SWOT analysis meetings were conducted throughout the state with Fish, Wildlife & Parks staff, the tourism industry and others with a vested interest in Parks. For additional input, questionnaires were sent to seasonal Parks employees and over 5,000 comment cards returned by visitors in 2004 were analyzed. Several key themes emerged from these sources.

¹⁰ Travel Industry Association, Domestic Travel Market Report, 2003 Edition, www.tia.org/Travel/traveltrends.asp

¹¹ Travel Industry Association, Domestic Travel Market Report, 2004 Edition, www.tia.org/Travel/traveltrends.asp

<p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Friendly, knowledgeable, and enthusiastic frontline staff. Visitor comment cards rated staff 4.7 on a 1-to-5 scale. •Existing interpretation and educational opportunities greatly add to a positive visitor experience. •Uniqueness and authenticity of each park •Diverse scenic beauty •Quality and variety of outdoor recreational opportunities •Day use areas are a good value and affordable to a wide range of visitors. •Parks with on-site staff presence are perceived as safe places to visit. 	<p><u>Weaknesses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Lack of identity and awareness – often confused with other public lands and agencies •Lack of developed facilities such as campsite hook ups, showers, and food concessions •Shortages of directional and interpretive signage •Lack of group sites •Shortage of interpretative staff •No camping reservations system •Lack of “packaging” with other tourism facilities •Lack of staffing for fishing access site maintenance •Parks website not user friendly •Diversity of parks often confuses the public about what kind of experience to expect
<p><u>Opportunities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Create a clear identity and consistent look and message •Create themed packages with local communities and other attractions •Form strategic partnerships with those who share a common vision •Redesign and enhance the Parks web site •Nurture support groups •Attract more group use •Add more interpretive programming and signs •Add amenities and activities to enhance visitor experience 	<p><u>Threats</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Rising price of gasoline impacts the drive market •Competing opportunities, which can be anything from video games to theme parks •Poor weather •Natural disasters such as fire and drought •Agency decisions not related to the parks, but are transferred to parks because it is part of FWP •Decisions made by the Division which may be unpopular

Historically, Montana State Parks has had several homes within state government, moving from the State Forester to the Department of Highways and then finally to the Fish and Game department, later named Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP). As a result, State Parks has never fully developed a strong identity. Even today, the public often refers to the agency as “Fish and Game.” This identity is further clouded by the many state and federal land management agencies in the state.

Montana State Parks is a vehicle through which the fish and wildlife values of Montana and the mission of Fish, Wildlife and Parks can be communicated to thousands of visitors each year. Strengthening this link between the Parks Division and the Fish and Wildlife Divisions will help in solidifying our identity with the public.

C. Services

The fifty Montana state parks are divided into three types: natural, cultural/historical, and water-based recreation. The facilities and services offered at these sites are very diverse. Seven parks have staffed visitor centers and eighteen parks offer camping. Other overnight accommodations include three cabins, three yurts and five tipis.

Parks merchandise is currently limited to denim shirts, caps, mugs, pins, three videos and one book, as well as specific site items in places such as Bannack, Makoshika, Chief Plenty Coups and Ulm Pishkun. Value-added activities include a variety of guided tours and hikes, field trip opportunities for students, interpretive programs and limited recreation equipment rental. Concessionaires at Tongue River, Caverns and Hell Creek offer limited groceries, food items, beverages, souvenirs and supplies.

Comparing Montana state parks to those in eighteen other western states shows Montana lagging behind in services and value-added activities. Only three other states (Nevada, Wyoming and Alaska) do not offer electrical or sewer hookups at their State Park campsites. Only one other state, Nevada, does not have a reservation system for any State Park campsites.

Most state parks systems offer a wide variety of value-added activities such as horseback rides, recreational equipment rentals, food and beverage services, recreational skills instruction, camp stores, horseshoe pits, volleyball courts, cross country ski trails and more. Some systems offer hostels, golf courses, and full-service lodges. The goal for Montana State Parks is to balance amenities which can enhance the visitor experience with a level of development which the current and future level of visitation can support.

D. Historical Marketing Efforts

Historically, Montana State Parks has not approached marketing as a comprehensive program. Past efforts, while well-intentioned, have been sporadic and reactive with no dedicated funding or

professional staff trained in marketing to develop a program. As the parks system has continued to grow and mature, and address other priority needs, the opportunity has developed to place a greater emphasis on marketing as part of the overall management system.

In the past, emphasis was placed on the sale of resident passports. Passport holders were the foundation of a mailing list to which a biennial newsletter was sent. With the change in fee structure, we lose the ability to communicate with loyal park users in the traditional manner.

In previous years, the majority of information about State Parks has been distributed through a parks brochure placed on racks within Montana. It has been the responsibility of individual parks to produce and distribute their own printed material, plan events and make their own media contacts. Assistance has been available via the FWP Conservation Education Division for these efforts but has been largely dependent on individual interest in the Parks program within each Region. Today, the Conservation Education Division has strengthened its commitment to serving the Parks Division and addressing its needs.

The lack of a comprehensive approach to the design of printed materials has failed to create a clear and consistent identity. A web site maintained by the Fish, Wildlife & Parks Information Technology staff contains detailed information about parks, but has not been designed to take advantage of many web technologies that add interest and interactivity to the site. Aside from infrequent inclusion in Travel Montana campaigns, playing a role in the Montana Tourism Recreation Initiative and participating in the annual Tourism Conference, State Parks have remained a relatively low-key player in the tourism industry.

III. Marketing Strategy

A. Mission

The mission of the Parks marketing effort is to create a strong identity and increase awareness of opportunities for Montanans and out-of-state visitors to experience Montana's rich heritage in state parks.

B. Target Audiences

After evaluation of our internal SWOT analysis, visitation reports, ITRR Niche News and national travel trends, Montana State Parks will aim to communicate predominately with Montana residents.

Specific target markets in Montana will include:

- K-12 students
- Soft Adventure Seekers
 - Campers
 - RVers
 - Hikers
 - Boaters
 - Cyclists
 - Wildlife Viewers
- Families
- Empty Nesters
- History and Native culture enthusiasts
- Communities and organizations interested in recreation development

Outside Montana, our continuing emphasis will be to work with Travel Montana to achieve the best results possible through packaging, publicity, familiarization tours and other joint marketing efforts.

C. Message

We will create a slogan or concise catch phrase that communicates the following:

“Montana's natural, cultural and recreational heritage is experienced in its State Parks where Montanans and out-of-state visitors connect and learn about the state's heritage in a comfortable, welcoming setting.”

Guiding Principles:

The following four principles reflect the vision statement for Montana State Parks. They will guide Parks Division employees in all actions and communications with our publics.

Stewardship

Share values of stewardship among parks staff and visitors, seeking opportunities to teach stewardship principles by demonstrating respect for the "place" and the need to balance recreation with the needs of the natural and cultural resources—and modeling that behavior for the general public.

Service

Build relationships with the Montana public through a strong public service ethic and friendly, enthusiastic person-to-person relationships.

Storytelling

Make Montana State Parks places where the many stories of Montana are shared with visitors.

Local Community Focus

In all things keep in mind that success is built on local relationships, one person at a time.

D. Goals and Objectives

The primary goals of this plan are:

- 1) Build identity and increase awareness of state parks by Montanans;
- 2) Raise awareness of the recreational grants and trails program;
- 3) Strengthen and enhance customer service;
- 4) Balance the quality and type of visitor experiences with long-term visitor impact;
- 5) Build strong working relationships with organizations that have common visions and goals;
- 6) Increase the flow of information and educational stories to targeted audiences; and
- 7) Obtain data from Parks users and non-users.

GOAL 1:

Generate greater awareness of State Parks so that most Montanans will be able, within three years, to easily identify that they are in a Montana State Park and to name at least three State Parks that they know from personal experience.

Objective 1.1: Create a marketing message that captures what Montana State Parks are and positions them positively in the minds of Montana residents and potential users of the State Parks.

Strategy: Create an identity that reflects the values of the Parks Division and its role within FWP and is consistent throughout the printed and visual material and all promotional and educational activities. An ad agency or contracted professional is best suited to develop the creative design aspect of the Parks identity.

Strategy: Have a presence at the Montana History Conference, Governor's Conference on Tourism, Montana Recreation and Parks Association, the Montana Weed Control Association, and other tourism and recreation gatherings.

GOAL 2: Raise the awareness of the recreational grants and trails program to Montana communities and recreational organizations.

Objective 2.1: Have a presence at meetings and conventions of Montana Association of Counties, League of Cities and Towns, and other recreation organizations.

Strategy: Create a trade show exhibit for the grants and trails program and participate in appropriate gatherings.

Objective 2.2: Participate in grand opening ceremonies upon the completion of projects and issue media releases that define FWP's role in the project.

Strategy: Coordinate attendance at functions with Parks Division staff and work with Regional Information Officers to issue releases as needed at application time and the completion of projects. Develop a distribution plan for the grants brochure.

GOAL 3:

Strengthen and enhance customer service by ensuring that the knowledgeable, friendly and enthusiastic attitude recognized by visitors as the State Parks' greatest asset is continuously enhanced and cultivated. Add Parks merchandise and value-added services where appropriate within the Montana State Parks system.

Objective 3.1: Set clear expectations for all parks staff and provide the training and tools necessary to ensure that employees can successfully and enthusiastically perform their jobs.

Strategy: Conduct employee customer service training on an ongoing basis and recognize employees for outstanding performance. Increase our web presence to recruit volunteers to assist with staffing.

Objective 3.2: Identify appropriate sites where there is consumer demand and staffing to handle additional

activities. Add at least two value-added services to the overall State Parks system each year.

Strategy: Work with Regional Park Managers to investigate revenue-generating ideas and possible concessionaires. Create a cost-revenue worksheet for each project to determine feasibility and return on investment. The decision to add an activity will be based on a combination of potential revenue and the value they add to the visitors' experience.

Objective 3.3: Develop a merchandising program featuring high quality products in several price ranges.

Strategy: Research potential merchandise relevant to the parks mission to sell online and in gift shops. Decisions to add those products to our existing line of merchandise will be based upon the market demand and their promotional value.

GOAL 4:

Balance the quality and type of visitor experiences, including day and overnight use, with long-term visitor impact on the natural and cultural resources in order to gain additional recreational value for the Montana public and other visitors.

Objective 4.1: Identify avenues of communication and promotional activities that will help balance the distribution of day users and overnight campers throughout the State Parks system and increase the amount of camping that occurs in specific State Parks as identified by Park Managers.

Strategy: Promote mid-week and shoulder season visits by creating special events and interpretive activities and potentially offering pricing incentives.

Objective 4.2: Protect and preserve the natural features in State Parks by creating alternative ways to "experience" some of the more fragile resources the parks have to offer.

Strategy: Provide more Parks experiences via interpretive programs, educational trunks and an interactive web site so that visitors and non-visitors can experience State Parks in non-traditional ways without impacting the natural and cultural resources.

Objective 4.3: Promote stewardship of Montana’s heritage and recreation resources among young people.

Strategy: Develop a single statewide, curriculum-based, educational program that can be delivered at parks and classrooms across the state and develop a promotional campaign for the program.

Objective 4.4: Create a program that recognizes and rewards visitors when they are seen doing something that shows exceptional stewardship responsibility in state parks and fishing access sites.

Strategy: Establish criteria and a “reward” item such as a pin or patch to honor good stewardship. Create public service announcements to introduce the program to the public.

GOAL 5:

Build strong working relationships with local communities, other state agencies, the tourism industry, federal partners, tribal entities, support groups, and companies and organizations with common visions and goals.

Objective 5.1: Build audiences for the education and interpretation programs and services offered at Montana State Parks by actively engaging local schools, tribal groups, elder groups, scouting programs, tourism bureaus, and special interest groups regionally and statewide in the development and presentation of these programs.

Strategy: Develop innovative ways to encourage interpretive program participation. Methods may include weekly radio broadcasts, weekly or biweekly newspaper columns, travel channel broadcasts, traveler information broadcast systems, cooperative community advertising.

Objective 5.2: Establish relationships with key community recreation, nature-based and culture-based organizations in the state and through these relationships explore opportunities to continually improve state parks programs and offerings to meet the needs of these interest groups.

Strategy: Develop partnerships with groups such as Elderhostel and Girl Scouts to create specific target market programs and events that will attract 30 to 100

participants. Ensure that these events are set apart from recreational special events and contain a high level of educational and interpretive content.

Objective 5.3: Sponsor a significant statewide recreational event or activity annually to gain top of mind awareness for State Parks and to generate strong public support, involvement and commitment to the State Parks System as a whole.

Strategy: Create a series of cultural arts festivals to take place at several parks around the state. Find a corporate or community sponsor for these events, which could occur during a time period designated as “State Parks Month.”

Objective 5.4: Create strategic partnerships with companies, federal and state partners, organizations and communities whose values and goals can be aligned with the mission of Montana State Parks.

Strategy: Helena Parks Office will develop a list of potential partners, and for each prepare a plan, a presentation, and a desired outcome to offer based upon how we can best maximize the value they want to achieve from their association with state parks.

Objective 5.5: Establish culturally appropriate Native American events which help communicate the cultural and historical story of Montana.

Strategy: Work with the Montana Tribal Tourism Alliance to identify and develop events that share the traditional and contemporary aspects of American Indian culture, while protecting the integrity and traditions of those cultures.

Objective 5.6: Link with local communities and tourism businesses to create at least two themed packages statewide.

Strategy: Solicit input from each FWP region for two themed packages in their area. The Helena Parks office would then identify potential partners and elements and decide who could best facilitate the packaging.

GOAL 6:

Increase FWP's statewide flow of information and educational stories on State Parks topics in a variety of media with messages targeted to specific audiences identified in this plan.

Objective 6.1: Increase the role the FWP State Parks web page plays in communicating to targeted audiences.

Strategy: Redesign the creative content of the web site to showcase an accurate and up-to-date picture of the diversity, vitality, and dynamic nature of Montana's resources and as a place to consider for a wide range of group, personal, travel, and leisure reasons.

Objective 6.2: Support and promote the themed packages to targeted markets.

Strategy: Issue stories about the packages to targeted special interest publications.

GOAL 7:

Obtain data from Parks users and non-users in order to identify where service and facility improvements and targeted marketing can positively affect campground occupancy rates and user distribution.

Objective 7.1: Obtain demographic, psychographic, service preference, and customer satisfaction level information about our current users at selected parks on an annual basis.

Strategy: Work with FWP Responsive Management Unit, Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research and other groups to determine best methodology for collecting data.

Objective 7.2: Obtain demographic, psychographic, and service preference information about non-users of Parks to determine barriers affecting visitation.

Strategy: Work with FWP Responsive Management Unit, Institute for Tourism and Recreation Research, and other groups to determine best methodology for collecting data.

E. Action Items

	Date to be completed	Control	Responsible Party
1. Goal: Build identity and increase awareness of state parks by Montanans			
1a. Hire an agency or contractor to do creative design	Oct. 1, 2005	2-year contract with renewal options	Howard
1b. Develop unified graphic design for signs and brochures			Howard, Soderberg
1c. Printed material designed and distribution plans established	Spring 2006	Continual evaluation and distribution system	Howard
1d. Exhibit at Montana fairs, travel and recreation shows			Howard, Con Ed, Other FWP staff
1e. Hire photographer for park images	2005-2007		Howard Tipton, Howard, Van Winkle
1f. Develop digital photo library			
2. Goal: Raise awareness of the recreational grants and trails program			
1a. Create a trade show exhibit			Howard, Timmerman
1b. Participate in MACO, MLCT and other meetings			Timmerman
1c. Issue media release for application process			Timmerman, Tipton
1d. Participate in grand opening events upon completion of projects			Timmerman
1e. Issue media release upon completion of projects			Timmerman, RIOs
3. Goal: Strengthen and enhance customer service			
1a. Conduct customer service training each spring	Ongoing		Howard
1b. Develop and distribute employee newsletter	Summer 2005		Howard
1c. Work with managers to increase volunteer participation			Howard, Managers
1d. Identify successful volunteer projects, develop media recognition	Fall 2005		Park Managers, Howard, Tipton

	Date to be completed	Control	Responsible Party
1e. Follow up on guest complaints within 5 days			Managers, Van Genderen
1f. Develop a group facilities guide to the parks	Winter 2005		Howard
2a. Research possible sites where value added activities would work. Prepare cost-revenue and feasibility worksheet.	Summer 2005		Howard, Alltucker
2b. Decide on implementation of value added services	Summer 2006		Managers
3a. Research merchandise options and prepare cost-revenue worksheets.	Summer 2005		Howard, Alltucker
3b. Prepare photos and text to be added to online parks store.	Summer 2005		Howard, Alltucker
4. Goal: Balance the quality and type of visitor experiences with long-term visitor impact			
1a. Identify appropriate sites for season extensions	Fall 2005		
1b. Establish mid-week visit promotions	Spring 2006		Howard
2a. Create one new education trunk each year	Spring 2006		Soderberg, Interpretive Staff
2b. Grand re-opening for Lone Pine and Makoshika after exhibits are completed			Park Managers
2c. Create interactive web pages with interpretive topics	Winter 2005		Soderberg, Interpretive Staff
3a. Contract with education specialist to develop program content	Winter 2005		Soderberg
4a. Establish stewardship name, criteria and award for recognizing people	Fall 2005		Howard, Semler, Committee
4b. Produce PSA's for stewardship program	Fall 2005		Tipton, Howard
4c. Introduce program at Parks Division meeting	Dec. 2005		Howard, Semler

	Date to be completed	Control	Responsible Party
5. Goal: Build strong working relationships with organizations that have common visions and goals			
1a. Develop cooperative project to insert parks on visitor channels at hotels	Summer 2006		Howard
1b. Develop a radio or TV program that will promote interpretive programs	Spring 2006		Soderberg
2a. Establish formal relationship with Elderhostel and Scouting program	Winter 2005		Soderberg
3a. Create new annual statewide event series	Summer 2006	Extensive monitoring and evaluation 5-yr contract, media support, at least one event/year	Howard, Managers
4a. Create statewide sponsorship, tied to at least one event per year	By Dec. 2006		Howard
5a. Place brochure racks at County Treasurer's offices and fill with park and FAS brochures	Fall 2005	Visit on quarterly basis to deliver more	Regional Park Managers
5b. Regional managers join Chambers of Commerce and tourism organizations and attend functions	Ongoing		Regional Park Managers
5c. Create two themed packages each year	Summer 2006		Howard, Park Managers
Goal 6: Increase the flow of information and educational stories to targeted audiences			
1a. Join key writers organizations	2005		Con Ed
1b. Host a dinner for Society of American Travel	Summer 2005		Howard, Tipton, R-2 staff
1c. Work with Con Ed to develop media kits	Fall 2005		Howard, Tipton
1e. Produce a minimum of three feature stories each year per region	Ongoing		Park Managers, RIOs
2a. Work with FWP IT staff to complete content upgrade	Spring 2006		Howard, IT staff
Goal 7: Obtain data from Parks users and non-users			
Work with RMU, ITRR or others to develop methodology and schedule surveys			Howard

F. Budget

The Parks Division has historically allocated funds to marketing efforts. This plan further focuses those efforts toward strengthening relationships and communicating the importance of Division programs and the opportunity for Montanans to participate in them. The recommended budget is \$95,000 in the first year and \$85,000 in the following years.

Contracted Services: \$25,000 – first year
 \$15,000 – subsequent years
Parks Brochure Printing: \$20,000
Printed Materials: \$10,000
Promotional Materials: \$10,000
Special Event Support: \$5,000
Partnership Support: \$20,000
Publicity: \$5,000

Infrastructure development and physical amenity improvements are not considered in this budget recommendation as those dollars will be coming from another fund. Interpretive programs and signs, employee training and merchandising will come from the Visitor Services Bureau budget.

Review and revision of the plan

This plan will be revisited for appropriateness and viability at least every 12 months. This does not mean reinventing it, but it does mean a close inspection of achievements, goals and challenges that have come up since it was written and adopted. Many things can change and adjustments may need to be made to the focus, direction, prioritization, or even the vision or mission of the parks. An open mind and a clear understanding of the current and forecast conditions will be critical to understanding what, if anything, needs rethinking.

IV. Conclusion

Montana's State Parks are fifty gems of unique beauty, exciting stories, and rich adventures that are just waiting to be discovered (or rediscovered) by greater numbers of resident and non-resident visitors. With the population and economy of the state changing, this is an opportune time to further define and solidify the image of State Parks, and pursue the marketing plan that will extend the seasons, tie the parks more closely to local communities, and enrich the lives of all who stop at a Montana State Park.